

squaremile

NO MORE MR ICE GUY

JON HAMM ON SAYING
GOODBYE TO DON DRAPER
AND HELLO TO HOLLYWOOD



'SPREZZATURA' IS THE LATEST BUZZWORD IN MENSWEAR, USED TO DESCRIBE A LOOK OF EFFORTLESS ELEGANCE. TAILORING AFICIONADO CRISTIANO CORNELIANI TALKS TO **ZOEY GOTO** ABOUT HOW BEST TO ACHIEVE THIS ELUSIVE STYLE





THE 'ITALIAN LOOK' is often used to describe the expressive refinement associated with Italian men – but in reality it's hard to pin down the exact definition of what the term means because huge regional distinctions exist. For the Italians, tailoring operates in much the same way as the food or landscape of the country, with each region offering its own unique flavour. Milan is synonymous with espresso-drinking men in sharp cashmere suits, while unstructured linen jackets are favoured for the balmy Neapolitan climate. There is, however, one thing that links these variations – and that is the term *sprezzatura*.

Although it has become a catchphrase of the moment, *sprezzatura* was first used in 1528 when humanist author Baldassare Castiglione employed it in *The Book of Courtier* to describe “a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and

“

Sprezzatura describes a style that has had thought invested in it yet manages not to appear contrived

make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort”. In its contemporary interpretation, *sprezzatura* describes a style that has had thought invested in it yet manages not to appear contrived or rigid. It is a look that turns heads while at the same time offering an effortless shrug.

Cristiano Corneliani, global sales director of the family-owned Corneliani tailoring house, is a man who epitomises the aura of *sprezzatura*. The Corneliani brand dates back to the 1930s and is still based in Mantua, northern Italy, a





What these men have is a confidence that signals they are wearing their suit rather than vice versa

romantic city that often crops up in the history books. Although it's a brand steeped in history, it has been pioneering new techniques for the menswear industry in recent years, including fragrance-infused textiles and computerised systems to precisely cut a suit pattern at lightning speed. It is perhaps this ability to acknowledge the past while looking firmly towards the future that has made Corneliani a luxury brand on a global scale, with 86 stores across the world.

Striding into his New Bond Street boutique, Cristiano greets me wearing a

beautifully-cut two-piece Corneliani suit in midnight blue, worn over a crisp white shirt and cashmere V-neck sweater. His greying beard is clipped short, his wrists are adorned with thin leather bracelets and a large navy and white polka-dot scarf is wrapped around his neck. By combining formal attire with casual elements, his overall look is one of artful dishevelment. Cast an eye over style blogs such as *The Sartorialist* or *Guerreisms* and you'll find further examples of suited men with shirt cuffs unbuttoned, monk straps unbuckled and tasselled scarves blowing in the wind. What these men have in common is a confidence that signals to the world that they are wearing their suit rather than vice versa.

"The term *sprezzatura* is very dear to me because it is closely linked to the history of the Corneliani tailoring house and my family," Cristiano explains. "Today, *sprezzatura* has come to mean the natural spontaneity that is typical of Italians. It searches for perfection while artfully



giving the impression of not trying at all. One might define it as a natural inclination for elegance, shaped by touches of casualness and deliberate juxtapositions."

The trick is to concentrate on the details, and Cristiano discusses what achieving success may come down to. "It could be one's choice of fabric, the colour of the lining or the choice of buttons. These details stand out particularly in a made-to-measure suit. Lines and proportions should enhance the physique and place the emphasis back on the man," he says. When it comes to accessories, he advises that particular care should be taken over cufflinks, pocket squares, ties, scarves, shoes and watches. "After all, these are the only whims us men are allowed to add an extra touch of colour or elegance," he explains. "Remember that they should be in keeping with the occasion and never be ostentatious but instead attract attention subtly and offer a glimpse of our true passions and personality."

This aesthetic has been reflected in the spring/summer 2014 Corneliani collection, which blends the understated Corneliani aesthetic with dashes of youthful energy. Tailored trousers are teamed with deconstructed sweaters and pastel-coloured blazers with suede loafers. It should also be noted that, in the typical Italian style, there is not a sock in sight. At the core of the collection is the suit, "which comes in stylish summer fabrics such as silk, shantung and linen," Cristiano says. "This season, jackets are more tapered, with smaller lapels creating a longer silhouette. This is further emphasised by slim-fitting trousers and a collection of accessories that brims with low-key, elegant style."

He says genuine *sprezzatura* relies on



While unexpected style touches are celebrated, the emphasis of *sprezzatura* lies in a look of harmony and grace

a certain attitude rather than just a set of style rules. "Dressing flawlessly is not just a question of tailoring technique or choosing the finest fabrics – it is completed by the attitude of the wearer," he explains. "A self-assured outward appearance should reflect the highest internal qualities." While unexpected style touches are celebrated, the overall emphasis of *sprezzatura* lies in creating a look of harmony and grace. As a reference point, look towards the self-assured style of Fiat cars director Gianni Agnelli. His relaxed personal look, with its off-kilter ties and wristwatch worn over the cuff, continues to influence contemporary men's fashion. "Many historical figures have been associated with the *sprezzatura* style, but its undisputed exponent *par excellence* is still Gianni Agnelli," Cristiano acknowledges.

He concludes that dressing in a refined *sprezzatura* style is a mark of consideration and regard for the people around you. "When you meet someone new, you only have a matter of seconds to make the right impression," he says. "Therefore, how you present yourself is extremely important."

And with this parting statement – "I feel that elegance is a form of respect towards others" – he's off, casually throwing his scarf across his shoulder and leaving to continue building his *sprezzatura* empire. ■

For more information, see CORNELIANI.COM

